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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the "content" standards in history, geography, civics, and social studies and how social studies specialists in six Mid-western states saw the standards being used in their states as of spring 1998. The data gathered came from the use of a Q-sort deck of 21 cards with statements regarding the standards and structured interviews following the Q-sort exercise. The outcomes of the standards movement are on the wane because they became voluntary in nature and were not a basis for national assessments. The standards are seen as a springboard for local discussion of curriculum and offering sources of new lesson ideas for the practitioner. Publishers see the national standards as a way to change instructional materials to align with state curriculum standards. The national standards appear to have made their greatest impact as a basis for state standards in the content areas. The standards have also had an influence on assessment in the content areas with expectations of behavior and may influence teacher preparation and inservice as ways of addressing the new assessments. The most lasting impacts of the national standards movement are in the state development models closely tied to the national standards, the changes of instructional materials such as textbooks, and the potential to influence mandatory assessments at the state level. The paper questions the lasting influence of the standards movement, as educational reform tends to make way for the next issue, innovation, or fad. The appendix offers the Q-sort items with the responses for each of the items. Contains 49 references. (EH)

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Using National Social Studies Standards in the Real World

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting
of the Social Science Education Consortium
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INTRODUCTION

A sabbatical leave during the spring semester of 1998 permitted me to follow-up on a process in which I was involved a few years ago. In the early 1990's I joined ten other colleagues in developing the social studies curriculum standards published by the National Council for the Social Studies (National Task Force for Social Studies Standards 1994). At about that same time several other teams were developing standards in history, geography, and civics (National Center for History in the Schools 1994A & B, Geography Education Standards Project 1994, Center for Civic Education 1994). Later a team would also develop standards in economics (National Council on Economic Education1997). The flurry of standards development was not limited to social studies, but that was and is the area that most interests me.

My sabbatical provided me with the opportunity to see what had happened to those standards once they left the hothouse environment of the development lab and moved into the real world of schools and other educational agencies. Given my long standing interest in the process of the adoption and disadoption of educational innovations I was reasonably sure that what the developers intended for their standards only partially matched what had actually happened with them and I wanted to fill in that picture.

The Dream of Standards-Driven Educational Reform

The dream of standards-based educational reform went something like this. The federal government would develop a set of national educational goals and would establish agencies that would generate criteria for the development of standards. State and professional groups, some of which would be supported by federal grants, would develop the actual standards. Those standards would then be submitted to another federal agency, which would have the authority to approve or reject them. States wishing to qualify for other federally funded education programs would have to develop or adapt standards consistent with the nationally approved standards. Finally, national assessments based on the approved standards would be developed and used to determine whether the new standards were being met. At least on paper it all looked very clean and workable, a top-down systems approach to solving our educational problems.

The Dream Confronts Political Reality

While it is difficult to establish exactly when the implementation of this dream

began, the publication of America 2000: An Education Strategy (U.S. Department of Education 1991) established the broad federal goals on which the standards program was to be based. America 2000, with the strong support of President Bush, called for the development of content standards, performance standards, and opportunity-to-learn standards. The Goals 2000 legislation, which followed, authorized the creation of a National Education Standards Improvement Council (NESIC) which would work with another new agency, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP), to develop criteria for certifying national content and student performance standards and opportunity to learn standards as well as certifying standards which would be submitted by the states and professional associations.

By 1993 John O'Neil (1993A) described the national standards movement as an idea that, "...has emerged as one of the most widely discussed options for improving the U.S. education system," a movement that "...has won over a significant number of supporters–among them President Bill Clinton and a surprising number of prominent educators (p. 4). He went on to cite several indicators of the strength of standards-driven reform. For example, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) had already published what would become the prototype standards document and over 40 states were already revising their curriculum frameworks to reflect those new standards.[1] Other professional organizations, social studies among them, were also developing their own standards, and Congress seemed ready to fund the support structure needed to make national standards work. Flood and Lap (1993) were also very optimistic about progress that had already been made toward a system of national goals, standards, and assessments.

In mid 1995 the Phi Delta Kappan featured a section on standards and Anne Lewis wrote that "...the notion of national standards for what students learn in schools is the hottest item in education reform today" (Lewis 1995, p. 745). Ironically, by that time serious problems had already begun to appear. Lewis grouped these problems around six questions:

1. What are standards?
2. Who is setting the standards?
3. Who decides if a standard is good?
4. What is causing all the controversy?
5. Are teachers being left out of the debate?
6. Will the public buy into the standards movement?

Put another way, the situation in 1995 was this: it was unclear just what it took

[1]The NCTM standards were published in 1989.

for something to qualify as a standard, there was disagreement over who's job it was to set standards, with everyone developing standards there was still no clear process for quality-control, standards developers had become embroiled in value-laden issues, classroom teachers were apprehensive about the avalanche of standards that would descend on them, and while the public supported standards in general they thought their local schools were already doing a good job.

The situation on the political front had definitely changed. In 1995 the new Republican Congress began dismantling the support structure for national standards. NESIC, which was to have certified state and local standards in all subject areas, was abolished. Political conservatives feared that it would become a "national school board" that would "dominate and interfere" with local decisions (Berkson1997, p. 210). But it was not only political conservatives who were upset. Liberals were becoming concerned that a national testing program based on "world class" standards would unfairly discriminate against large numbers of African American and Latino students. Thus, while the standards movement still showed promise and retained momentum, it was also clear that the honeymoon was over. As with all dreams, what looked so simple and logical on paper was more complicated once it was in the public arena.

Meanwhile, Back in Social Studies

Social studies presented two special problems for those advocating standards-driven reform. First, should there be one set of interdisciplinary, social studies standards or should standards be developed in each of the related subject areas such as history, geography, economics, sociology, etc? Second, how should standards developers deal with the many value issues and political interpretations so common in social studies, history, and the social sciences? As it turned out both issues would be resolved, but not to everyone's satisfaction.

Because they were mentioned by name in the Goals 2000 legislation; history, civics and geography standards development efforts were awarded federal funding. Social studies, considered to be a "non-" or "soft" discipline by politicians, was left off the list and ultimately funded by the National Council for the Social Studies. Economics, even though one of the traditional disciplines, was the last to develop standards, and also on their own in terms of funding. When the dust settled people in social studies found themselves with six sets of national standards and a plethora of state and local standards.

It was the history standards, especially the high school U.S. history standards, that walked into the values minefield and set off a firestorm of debate. Accused of being too liberal, too multicultural, and too focused on negative events in our history,

the proposed standards were condemned by a vote of 99:1 in the U.S. Senate.[2] It is not my intent to reconstruct the debate over the history standards. Those wishing to do so will find they have dozens of articles from which to choose (Diegmueller 1995, Elson 1994, Evans and Pang 1995, Gluck 1994, Jones 1995, Nash and Ross 1995, Saunders 1996, Schneider 1995, Sax 1996, Whelan 1996).

And, as mentioned earlier, there was considerable confusion over what was meant by the term, standards. To some, standards implied a list, often long, of what students need to know and be able to do. The people writing about standards (Cohen 1996, Eisner 1995, Noddings 1997, Ravitch 1995, Rigeluth 1997, etc) generally refer to these as "content" or "curriculum" standards. Others use the term, standards, to refer to how much students need to know or how well they need to be able to do something, for example, name all the U. S. Presidents versus name them in the order of their terms in office and give their party affiliation.[3] For the sake of clarity let us call these types "performance" standards. Still others use standards to refer to opportunities to do or lean something such as, "all students should have access to the Internet" or "all students should have the opportunity to work with historical documents or actual social science data." These are generally termed "opportunity to learn" (OTL) standards.

In this paper I want to focus on "content" standards, because that is what the history, geography, civics, and social studies standards are; content standards. It is not that performance standards are not important. In fact, one could make the case that without performance standards, curriculum standards are essentially useless. But content standards are what we have in our field, so they became the objects of my study.

Study Design and Data Collection

The focus of this study was on how social studies specialists in six Mid-western states saw the standards being used in their states. Data was collected using a set of Q-sort cards and structured interviews. In addition, the social studies standards of the six states and some commercial materials were also examined. Finally, several

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[2] This debate and vote took place on January 18, 1995.

[3] For an example of how many different ways one can look at knowledge about George Washington see: Allen 1997.

representatives of publishing companies were informally interviewed.

The Q-sort deck was a technique I had developed and used in two previous studies (Marker1984 & 1987). I claim no statistical significance for the process, but it does allow respondents to react to specific statements, many of which are then revisited during the actual interviews.

In this instance a Q-sort deck of 21 cards, each containing a statement about standards, was developed using either statements made during informal interviews with several people or from positions taken in the literature dealing with standards. Prior to the structured interview, each participant in the study was asked to sort the Q-sort deck into four piles based upon the extent to which they either agreed or disagreed with the statement on the card.[4] Structured interviews followed the Q-sort exercise. These interviews lasted between one and two hours and were typically conducted in the respondent's office, though two interviews were conducted at the Great Lakes Regional Social Studies meeting in Rosemont, Illinois. All interviews took place during April and May of 1998. In every case I felt respondents were candid and helpful, for which I sincerely thank them. In an effort to get some notion of how publishers of social studies materials were reacting to the social studies standards I also spoke with several publishers representatives during the Great Lakes Regional meeting.

I obtained some sets of standards and the two Fordham Reports (Munroe & Smith 1998, Saxe 1998) via the Internet, though most often I was given the standards during the interview visit. As a cross-check, I interviewed the social studies supervisor in a large city in Indiana and an Illinois social studies teacher who chaired one of the state standards development teams.

Findings

Uses of the Standards: Intended and Otherwise

When an innovation is under development its designers make certain assumptions about how it will be used. Those assumptions do not always prevail once the innovation reaches the hands of users, despite specific instructions from the developers to the contrary. For example, the designers of modern automotive engines make certain assumptions and recommendations regarding maintenance that should be performed at periodic intervals. We all know from experience that some owners then follow those recommendations to the letter while others follow them hardly at all,

4 A complete listing of all Q-sort items and the breakdown of responses can be found in Appendix A.

much to the dismay of the engineers who designed the engines. As a result, some engines perform as expected but many others do not. Alas, that is the nature of the real world where there is often quite a poor fit between the intended and actual uses of an innovation.

The Standards as a Basis for National Assessments

It would be unfair to characterize most, or even many, of the people who developed the various standards as advocates of educational change based on an interlocking system of national standards linked to national assessments, the results of which were then connected to federal aid to schools. While some of the developers might have wished that the standards they were developing would be mandatory, and certainly some influential people must have felt that way, otherwise why invest several million dollars in standards development, that hope vanished when the political mood swung against federal mandates of any sort. When that happened all the standards, of necessity, became voluntary. For those who viewed national standards as a way to compel change in social studies, the game was over. By 1997, when the economics standards were published, the term voluntary was even included in the title (National Council on Economic Education 1997). The other sets of standards each indicate, in one way or another, that they also are intended to be voluntary.

In retrospect, it would have been politically unwise and perhaps impossible to enforce a set of national standards. None of my respondents, all daily players in the politics of education policy, thought that such a move would have been feasible and only two respondents "somewhat disagreed" with the following Q-sort item.

> The worst thing you could do to the whole idea of national standards would be to make them mandatory.

Even when state standards borrow heavily from the national standards, and many do, the resulting state standards have the support of legislators and state school boards. Such support is deemed critical when state standards are later questioned or attacked. National standards never enjoyed such support and without it could never have been made mandatory.

A majority of respondents agreed with the Q-sort item[5] indicating that the entire national standards movement had already begun to lose its momentum. Most attributed this decline to the fact that the standards were not going to be linked to a national assessment. So respondents did not want mandatory standards, and by implication, a

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[5] I see the national standards movement as already on the wane. When Congress cut the funding for the National Board of Standards-Driven Assessment that spelled the beginning of the end for national standards.

mandatory national assessment, but they agreed that without assessments to support them national standards were not going to amount to much.

The belief that the movement was losing momentum apparently did not stem from a perception that the national standards were unrealistic, since six of the eight respondents disagreed with a Q-sort item expressing that opinion [6] Nor did it apparently grow out of a belief that national standards were to be avoided, since only two of the eight respondents agreed with this Q-sort:

> I think the job of writing standards is something that is best left to the state and local districts. It is a mistake to think one can write national, one-size-fits-all standards.

At first glance, it may seem inconsistent to oppose national standards but then also believe that standards development should not be left to the states and local school districts. They key to understanding this apparent inconsistency is the idea of mandatory standards that most respondents opposed and thought would not work. Voluntary national standards were fine, and as will be seen later, and were often used in constructing state standards.

Likewise, the idea that standards should only be written at the level where they would actually be used received little support. Only two of the respondents agreed, and then only somewhat, with the following Q-sort item:

> It doesn't do much good to write standards at the state or federal level. The only standards that mean much are those worked out between teachers and their students. Maybe another way to put it is to say that you can't write standards for someone else.

In some states local school districts are required to construct and administer their own assessments to document student learning. Several respondents felt that such a requirement was either never met or poorly met, so the idea of having standards written and assessed at the local level did not seem to them to be realistic.

As indicated earlier, while the mandatory, top-down, standards-driven model of reform may have had some support at the national level it clearly had little support among people working at the state level. Because Congress withdrew support, it never came down to a test of power between the two approaches to see which level would prevail. The states simply won by default in the political arena. The belief in state and local control of schools still carries enormous weight. However, those who oppose standards in any form cannot claim victory. As states have borrowed from the national standards and developed their own assessments the idea of standards linked to

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[6] These national standards in social studies and the various subjects like history and geography, are simply unrealistic. I honestly doubt that most well educated adults could meet them – why pretend that all or even most students should be able to!

assessments has grown to the point where Philo (1998) recently wrote that "...standards and assessments are clearly becoming the backbone of educational reform movements" (p. 342).

The Standards as a Springboard for Local Discussions of Curriculum

One of the things that developers of the national standards hoped was that their standards would, at the very least, lead to local discussions of what children should know and be able to do in social studies, ideas expressed in two Q-sort items:

> The most useful thing the national standards do is to serve as a basis for continuing the discussion regarding what our students should be learning.
>
> Even if national standards don't lead to increased student knowledge, they will have at least helped us clarify what is important in the curriculum.

Even though most respondents agreed with these two items, during the interviews I found little support for the idea that the standards had become the basis for such discussions in local schools, something a study by Grant (1995) would have predicted. Most indicated that their state standards received much more scrutiny and discussion at the local level than did the national standards. Various reasons were given for this; the national standards were bulky and unmanageable, the state standards were the ones that would be assessed, and teachers were too busy preparing for state assessments to concern themselves with what "might have been" when it came to setting standards. But respondents apparently did not attribute the lack of local discussions to the fact that teachers already knew what students needed to know and thus did not want to be bothered with such discussions, since they split almost evenly between agreeing and disagreeing on the following Q-sort item:

> Look, the problem isn't "what children should know and be able to do?" Most teachers already know that. The real question is, "How do we get them to do it?"

But things changed greatly when respondents were asked about how the standards were used by the committees developing state standards. At that level the national standards often became a source of ideas and support for the state standards, as we will see later.

The Standards as a Source of New Lesson Ideas

Since I did not survey individual teachers I am not sure how much they actually use the standards as a source of new lesson ideas. My own experience with

undergraduates in my methods classes, where such use of the standards is by far the most popular, lead me to think that teachers who bother to look at the standards will also use them that way. However, respondents were not sure, splitting evenly in their support for the following Q-sort item:

> The people in history, geography, and NCSS may have intended for the standards they developed to be statements of what students should know, but to me the most useful aspects of these standards documents is as a source of new lesson ideas for teachers.

Respondents said during the interviews that teachers often commented favorably regarding examples that appeared in their state standards. Couple that with the fact that several reviews of the draft NCSS standards also recommended that the lesson examples, called vignettes, contained in the document be printed and sold separately, and I think one can build a good case that the standards may indeed be getting such use, though again the data on this are sketchy at best.[7] One thing seems certain, the easier it is to obtain standards and their related examples, the more likely it is that teachers will turn to them for lesson ideas. The National Science Education Standards, for example, can be printed directly from the Internet without charge.[8]

The Standards as a Way to Change Instructional Materials

Based upon my conversations with publishers, it is clear that they are aware of the various national standards and are quickly trying to inform potential customers about how their social studies products align with those standards. Several publishers had already produced advertising materials illustrating how their products conformed to this or that standard and without exception they indicated they would incorporate the recommendations contained in the standards in their next editions. But my respondents were much less certain such change would occur, with only five of the eight agreeing with the following Q-sort:

> Based upon our experience so far, it is in the area of instructional materials, such as textbooks, where the national standards will eventually have their greatest impact.

Perhaps it was the term "greatest" that caused several respondents to disagree with this statement, but interview data suggest two other possibilities. First, some respondents felt that any alignments would be superficial, with publishers doing their best to make their materials appear to be "new" and "aligned" when in fact they really

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7 Recently both NCSS (Haas and Laughlin1997) and the National Center for History in the Schools (1996) published volumes containing lesson ideas consistent with their standards.

8 The science standards can be accessed at the following Internet address: http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/nses/

had not changed. Two respondents felt that it would depend upon what the large market states like California, Texas and Florida wanted, since they would be the real focus of any revisions made by publishers. If those states wanted materials aligned with the national standards, then they would be, otherwise it would be the standards linked to assessments in large markets that eventually drove the revisions in materials. Respondents from states where schools purchased materials from off a state adoption list felt that their state standards might wield some small influence with publishers, but those respondents from states that practiced open adoption offered little hope that their state standards would carry much weight when it came time for publishers to revise their materials, even if their state standards were linked to state-wide assessments. However, respondents generally agreed that IF mandatory nation-wide assessments had been based upon the national standards then instructional materials would have truly been realigned with the standards, at least with those being assessed.

The Standards as a Basis for State Standards

It appears that this is the area where the national standards made their greatest impact. All states in my sample have developed their own social studies standards, though they are sometimes referred to as something else.[9] In one state the standards development process was well along before drafts of the national standards were available, but in the other states that were developing their own standards at the time the national standards became available, those standards became an important resource.

As noted earlier, some have argued that standards should not be written at one level, for use at another level, (Noddings 1997) but respondents tended not to agree. Only two of the eight even "somewhat agreed" with the following Q-sort item:

> It doesn't do much good to write standards at the state or federal level. The only standards that mean much are those worked out between teachers and their students. Maybe another way to put it is to say that you can't write standards for someone else.

Even the two respondents who somewhat agreed were, like the remaining five, writing standards for some one else (i.e., local districts in their states) as a part of their jobs, and in all but one state those standards were linked to statewide assessments.

However, there was little desire to restrict standards development to the state and local levels, in part because the respondents viewed the national standards as useful, both as a source of ideas for their state standards and as a form of authoritative cover when their state standards came under fire. No one expressed concern about

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9 For example, Indiana refers to their standards as "proficiencies".

the extent to which their state standards resembled various national standards because the borrowing process was always part of the state committees discussion about what should be in the their social studies curriculum. Respondents considered the process of developing the standards to be more important than the source of the standards. This is reflected by the fact that all respondents agreed with the Q-sort to that effect.[10]

Five of the eight respondents disagreed with the Q-sort indicating that subject-specific standards helped reduce confusion.[11] As they developed their most recent standards, several states were revising earlier guidelines or frameworks that were organized thematically, so the thematic nature of the NCSS standards (National Task Force for Social Studies Standards1994) made the best fit. But the individual disciplines are certainly identifiable in most state standards, though not necessarily called history, geography, etc. It is in the "quality of life" areas where the state standards most differ from the discipline-specific national standards.[12] State committees were much more willing to include what can appropriately be called "good citizen" standards than were the authors of the discipline-specific standards.[13] For example, one of the six strands in the Ohio standards (Ohio Department of Education 1994) is titled, Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities. When translated into actual objectives this strand means things like: shows care for the needs of others, displays respect for authority, works in groups to achieve mutual goals, associates the exercise of responsibilities with the exercise of rights, and participates in a project designed to save the community. The Indiana Proficiencies (Indiana Department of Education 1996) have, as one of its strands, Civic Ideals and Practice. One of the intended outcomes associated with that strand is, "Develop a commitment to the civic values needed to function responsibly in a democratic society." (p.5) The Michigan standards include one dealing with citizen involvement, "All students will consider the effects of an individual's actions on other people, how one acts in accordance with the rule of law, and how one acts in a virtuous and ethically responsible way as a member of society." (Michigan State Board of Education 1995, p. 24)

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[10] It is the PROCESS of developing state and local standards that is important, even when those efforts draw heavily on the content of the various national standards.

[11] I think it really helps reduce the confusion to have standards in specific subject areas such as history, geography, civics, and economics. General social studies standards are OK for elementary schools but the high schools need subject-specific standards.

[12] Only two of the eight respondents agreed with this Q-sort item: The most useful national standards are those dealing with content knowledge rather than those which deal with what I'll call "quality of life" issues such as self-concept, being a better citizen, moral and spiritual issues, and aesthetics.

13 The NCSS and Civics standards do include several standards of a "citizenship" nature.

Even though state standards include more of the value laden "good citizen" objectives, an area where most of the national standards tread lightly, it would be wrong to assume that state standards development committees could ignore politically sensitive issues. On the contrary, each state had its own political issues. In one state they were forced to remove a strand having to do with global issues. In another state several approved sequences of high school history are described, among them one where U.S. and world history are merged. Another respondent said such a suggestion in her state would be politically impossible! So while political concerns varied from state to state, they were there for the state standards developers to contend with.

As was the case with the national standards, state standards were content rather than performance standards, and even then at a very general level. Most states have a strong tradition of local control, which calls for the selection of specific content to be left up to local districts. Thus a standard might call for students to "describe the role of heroes in American culture" without specifying which heroes or what would constitute a satisfactory response to such a standard. In some states the process of converting content standards to performance standards is delegated to the testing and evaluation division and in two states outside commercial firms are given the task. Teachers, however, are then typically involved in developing scoring rubrics for such items. Regardless of who gets the job, before assessment can take place general standards must be translated into specific examples and tasks, and scoring rubrics developed, but most state standards do not provide that level of detail. Recall that it was just such detail that caused the public outcry over the U.S. History standards, so state standards committees had little incentive to provide similar specifics. Ironically it was the lack of such specifics that caused most state standards to receive failing grades in the Fordham reports (Munroe & Smith1998, Saxe 1998).

The Standards as a Means of Influencing Assessment

Murry Nelson has written that the national standards are unrealistic in terms of what they propose that students know (Nelson 1998). While the majority of respondents disagreed with a Q-sort to that effect[14], I think Nelson is right. But what the standards advocate, that I believe is realistic, is that students learn the skills of applying what they know as opposed too simply remembering a long list of facts. Assessing that type of learning generally requires something other than simple, objective-type questions. Several of the states are experimenting with just such open-ended, constructed-response types of items despite the fact that they are difficult to construct

[14] These national standards in social studies and the various subjects like history and geography, are simply unrealistic. I honestly doubt that most well educated adults could meet them – why pretend that all or even most students should be able to!

and expensive and time consuming to score. Respondents generally agreed that students had a right to know what was expected of them, and how they would be expected to meet each standard. Given that, the problem becomes one of how to help students demonstrate their knowledge in the manner called for in the new types of assessments that are being developed.

California was one of the early leaders in preparing teachers to score the new, open-ended items, something they must know before they can help their own students acquire the skills tested by such items. All respondents agreed with the following Q-sort:

> Teachers need to see examples of actual "good" and "bad" student responses to application-type, open-ended assessment items if they are going to help students get better at applying what they know. Just publishing standards isn't going to do it.

However, two respondents "somewhat disagreed" with the following Q-sort item:

> Abstract goals and general standards cannot help teachers and parents nearly as much as real examples of actual student work. Accompanied by a discussion "in plain English" of how the quality of those responses differ.

Based upon interview data the part of the statement that generated some disagreement had to do with the abstract goals and general statements not being as helpful as specific examples. Given that the state standards and goals are of a general nature, the item really pulled some respondents in two differing directions.

Several states are considering developing materials that will help teachers learn to cope with these new types of assessments, and in the process, help students learn how to achieve on such assessments. The Wisconsin standards include a sample proficiency standard and examples of actual student work (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction1998). Illinois has a more ambitious project underway that will show teachers numerous actual examples of student responses to open-ended assessment items. Their web site[15] shows scoring rubrics for actual items and then shows how graders have judged the answers using those rubrics. California also sells such materials (Pallmquist 1994) in print form, but the beauty of the Illinois materials is that they match their own state standards. Michigan has published a series of booklets that include open-ended and constructed-response assessment items, student responses, and scoring guides. (State Administrative Board 1998) As state assessments move toward these more alternative types of items the pressure will no doubt grow for all states to produce similar materials keyed to their own standards. As teachers

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[15] http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/jabraun/braun/professional/sslinks.html

work with these materials there is a good chance that they will begin to think differently about how and what they teach.[16]

Any Lasting Impacts?

All innovations, whether simple or complex, seem to follow a similar path. They burst upon the scene like a Fourth of July skyrocket. Innovators embrace them, the media hype them, workshops introduce and install them, and most promise to be the answer to our educational woes. But eventually they fade into the night, leaving a few glowing embers as the next innovation moves into the limelight and the cycle begins anew. We are left to ponder what, if anything, remains of the much-touted innovation?

In the case of the national standards in social studies and history/social science, what impact will they have made when all is said and done? The federal model described at the beginning of this paper has long since faded into the blackness of the night, taking with it any hope of national approval and assessments. Good idea or not, it was not going to happen! But it does appear that the national standards will have made a lasting impact in at least three areas.

As I have already indicated, many states borrowed heavily from the various standards as they prepared there own frameworks and standards and their standards eventually do get linked to statewide assessments. Not only are these state standards coupled to assessments, they are more manageable then the several inches high stack of national standards documents. And, even more importantly, they have the support of local policy makers. Of course their quality varies, though their "worth" and "goodness" might not reflect the criteria employed by the authors of the Fordham Reports (Munroe & Smith 1998, Saxe 1998). So the idea of national standards and assessments is, at least for now, dead. But state standards linked to state assessments are alive and well. Who knows if we would have had the latter without the former?

The second area where it appears that the national standards will leave their mark, though for how long remains to be seen, is in the arena of instructional materials, especially textbooks. While respondents did not all agree that this would happen, most

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16 The New Standards Project is built around this philosophy of assessments influencing classroom behavior. Laruen Resnick, one of the Directors of the NSP, put it this way, "...whatever kind of test matters in the system has a heavy influence on classroom practice. In a way we should be celebrating that; don't we want teachers to work hard so that their students will achieve on the assessments that society says matter?" (O'Neil 1993B, p. 17)

of the publishers and editors with whom I spoke were confident that such change would come to pass, and indeed, some already had. They indicated they either have or will be aligning their materials with the standards. In some cases this will amount to little more than showing in their promotional materials how their current materials already match up with this or that standard; hardly an impact. But in other cases editors indicate that the next revision of the materials will actually try to incorporate several of the standards. Since these same publishers have previously responded to other trends (e.g., the use of case studies, primary documents, and Internet sites) there is no reason not to take them at their word. And the incentive to make such changes will increase as state assessments are revised to reflect the new state standards, which in turn reflect the national standards.

Like the predictions about future changes in instructional materials, any impact in this third area depends mainly upon inference, so perhaps it is more accurately termed "potential" impact. States are changing their mandatory assessments, placing increasing emphasis on problem solving, on items with more than one right answer, with answers that have varying levels of correctness. Given the expense of such assessments it remains to be seen how many will stay the course, but to the extent that they do the national standards deserve some of the credit. Once such assessments become institutionalized teachers will have to change how they teach if their students are to do well on these highly visible indicators, and that has the potential to be the most significant impact of the three!

Was It Worth It?

Several millions of dollars were spent developing national standards in history, geography, civics, and economics, and social studies. Given the likely outcomes, was it worth it? Would we have been better off to spend that money on more up-to-date textbooks, more computers, or teacher salaries? Perhaps, but the politics and economics of education demand that there always be something new on the educational horizon. The standards movement was a response to the demand for more rigor and accountability in the curriculum. One of its short range accomplishments was to allow the educational community to say, "Look, we are working on this problem, so cut us a little slack," an accomplishment of no small importance. Will children actually learn more or learn how to better use what they know? Maybe, it is too early to tell, but a recent international study is not encouraging. (Wolf 1998) Did we learn anything from this exercise in national standards? Again, I think it is too early to tell, though hopefully this paper will make a small contribution in that direction.

It is difficult to predict how much staying power standards-driven reform will actually have. Given the amount of money states are investing in writing standards and

their related assessments, this movement may have a longer then normal "shelf life" when compared to the typical educational innovation. But unless I am badly mistaken, even standards-driven reform will eventually make way for the next issue, innovation, or fad; for if there is one lesson we learned long ago it is that there will always be something new to replace what is presently considered to be the latest and best.

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Appendix A
Q-SORT ITEMS SHOWING RESPONSES

Item	Very Much Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Very Much Disagree
1 The people in history, geography, and NCSS may have intended for the standards they developed to be statements of what students should know, but to me the most useful aspects of these standards documents is as a source of new lesson ideas for teachers.	1	3	3	1
2 Based upon our experience so far, it is in the area of instructional materials, such as textbooks, where the national standards will eventually have their greatest impact	2	3	1	2
3 The most useful national standards are those dealing with content knowledge rather than those which deal with what I'll call "quality of life" issues such as self-concept, being a better citizen, moral and spiritual issues, and aesthetics.	0	2	3	3
4 The worst thing you could do to the whole idea of national standards would be to make them mandatory.	3	3	2	0
5 Look, the problem isn't "what children should know and be able to do?" Most teachers already know that. The real question is, "How do we get them to do it?"	1	3	3	1
6 I see the national standards movement as already on the wane. When Congress cut the funding for the National Board of Standards-Driven Assessment that spelled the beginning of the end for national standards.	1	3	2	2
7 Given the politics of education, once history, geography, and civics began developing their standards, NCSS didn't really have any choice. Even if they don't make much difference in terms of what goes on in the schools, the NCSS standards at least kept social studies from being "odd man out."	3	3	0	1
8 Teachers need to see examples of actual "good" and "bad" student responses to application-type, open-ended assessment items if they are going to help students get better at applying what they know. Just publishing standards isn't going to do it.	5	3	0	0
9 As I see it, national standards are just the old behavioral objectives in a different wrapper.	0	2	0	6
10 Abstract goals and general standards cannot help teachers and parents nearly as much as real examples of actual student work, accompanied by a discussion "in plain English" of how the quality of those responses differ.	3	3	2	0
11 This whole national standards thing isn't going to amount to much unless the standards get linked to assessment.	4	3	1	0
12 These national standards in social studies and the various subjects like history and geography, are simply unrealistic. I honestly doubt that most well educated adults could meet them – why pretend that all or even most students should be able to!	0	2	4	2

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13 It isn't realistic to have one set of standards that ALL students must meet. Instead, we ought to have different levels of standards so that students could strive for excellence in some areas and just satisfactory performance in other areas.	0	2	3	3
14 I think it really helps reduce the confusion to have standards in specific subject areas such as history, geography, civics, and economics. General social studies standards are OK for elementary schools but the high schools need subject-specific standards.	0	3	5	0
15 It doesn't do much good to write standards at the state or federal level. The only standards that mean much are those worked out between teachers and their students. Maybe another way to put it is to say that you can't write standards for someone else.	0	2	1	5
16 I think the job of writing standards is something that is best left to the state and local districts. It is a mistake to think one can write national, one-size-fits-all standards.	1	1	4	2
17 The most useful thing the national standards do is to serve as a basis for continuing the discussion regarding what our students should be learning.	6	2	0	0
18 Even if national standards don't lead to increased student knowledge, they will have at least helped us clarify what is important in the curriculum.	7	1	0	0
19 It is the PROCESS of developing state and local standards that is important, even when those efforts draw heavily on the content of the various national standards.	6	2	0	0
20 It was difficult enough to get agreement on standards that indicate what students ought to know. I don't think we could ever agree on how much or how well students ought to know what is called for in the standards.	0	3	3	2
21 It is only fair that students be informed in advance concerning what they need to know and be able to do. Teachers should be very open with students regarding the standards they will eventually have to meet.	8	0	0	0

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